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ABSTRACT

Differences in self-esteem between 48 minority and 62 non-minority intellectually gifted and 75 intellectually average junior-high students were assessed using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. Results indicated a higher level of self-esteem for the gifted students than for the control group. Significant differences were also found to exist between males and females, with males exhibiting higher self-esteem scores. Self-esteem was also significantly higher in the non-minority females than for the minority females. Pre-post self-esteem scores were analyzed for seven minority students participating in an academic enrichment program, but no significant differences were found as a result of program participation. (JDD)

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Self-Esteem Comparisons Among Intellectually Gifted Minority/Non-Minority Junior High Students

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Abstract

Differences in self esteem between minority and non-minority intellectually gifted and intellectually average functioning junior high students were assessed using the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory. Results indicate a higher level for the gifted students than for the control group. Significant differences were also found to exist between males and females, with males exhibiting higher self-esteem scores. Self-esteem was also significantly higher in the non-minority females than the minority females. Pre-post self-esteem scores were analyzed for a group of minority students participating in an academic enrichment program. No significant differences were found in self-esteem as a result of program participation. Implications for educational programs will be addressed.

Self-Esteem Comparisons Among Intellectually Gifted Minority/ Non-Minority Junior High Students

Self esteem refers to the regard one holds about oneself and may include locus of control and judgements of confidence and self worth. Past studies have indicated a correlation between low self esteem and poor achievement in school (O'Malley and Bachman, 1979) and difficulties in social interactions (Rosenberg, 1965). Such findings recognize the importance of positive self esteem and confidence to succeed.

Past studies have also investigated the aspects of self concept, such as self esteem, locus of control, and perceived popularity between adolescents considered to be intellectually gifted and average students. Brody and Benbow (1986) found that students considered to be highly gifted perceived themselves as less popular despite greater internal locus of control. Tidwell (1979) investigated the differences in self-concept, locus of control and attitudes toward school in Black, Asian, White and Hispanic-American gifted tenth-grade students. Results of this study indicated that the gifted students had a higher level of self-esteem than the norm groups. In addition, the results also suggested differences between specific minority groups with gifted Black students having overall higher self-concept scores and gifted Hispanic students showing the lowest overall self-concept scores for the groups tested.

The purpose of this study was to identify any significant differences in self esteem between the gifted minority and gifted non-minority students and between the gifted students and a control group of intellectually average students. The scores on the Adult and Child forms

of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory were also compared for each student to see if any significant correlations existed.

Method

Subjects

One hundred thirty-one intellectually gifted seventh and eighth grade students, of mixed racial backgrounds served as the subjects in this study. Ninety-nine of the subjects were students of the Buffalo City Honors School and eleven of the subjects were participants in a special enrichment program at the University of Buffalo. Among the intellectually gifted students, there were 62 white and 48 minority students. Selection of subjects was based on enrollment in a program for the intellectually gifted. A group consisting of seventy-five average functioning students from Buffalo public and parochial schools served as the control condition. In both the gifted and control conditions, the subjects were of various ethnic backgrounds including Caucasian, Black, Hispanic and Asian, and ranged from twelve to fifteen years of age. The scores of thirty-eight students were eliminated because of inappropriate responses to the questionnaires, or subject attrition.

Materials

Self esteem was tested using the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory, Child and Adult forms. This inventory measures attitudes toward the self in social, academic, and personal contexts. The Child form of the test consists of 58 questions, which are grouped into four subscales: General Self, School-Academic, Social Self-Peers, and Home-Parents. A lie scale has also been incorporated into the test as an index

of defensiveness. To arrive at a self-esteem score, the number of items answered correctly on each sub-scale, except the lie scale, are summed and then multiplied by two, making the total possible score one hundred. The Child form of the test is generally used with children aged eight to fifteen. The Adult form of the test consists of twenty-five items and is generally used with children over the age of fifteen. The questions were adapted from the Child form, and are more applicable to older children and adults, whose lives are not as closely bound to parents and school. To arrive at a self-esteem score for the Adult form the number of items answered correctly are summed and multiplied by four, making the total possible score one hundred.

Procedure

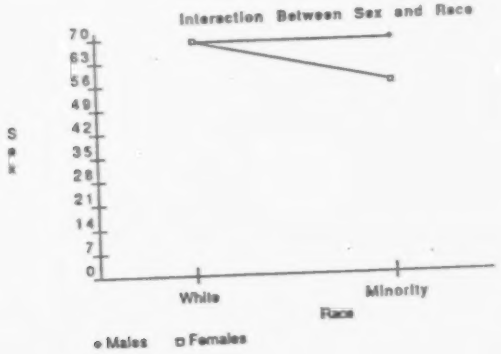
The Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory was administered to one hundred thirty-one intellectually gifted and seventy-five intellectually average, minority and non-minority, seventh and eighth grade students. Subjects were administered both the Adult and Child forms of the test, in mixed group settings during fall semester. Students participating in the academic enrichment program were administered the same instruments again at the conclusion of spring semester. All subjects were administered the Child form of the test first. St

Results

Data were analyzed using the StatView 512+ statistical software package. A correlational matrix was developed to assess inter-relationships among demographic variables and Coopersmith scores. The results of this analysis indicate a high correlation between the scores

received by the individual students on the Adult and Child forms of the test. Analyses of variance were computed to determine any differences in self-esteem scores between the groups. Table 1 (insert table 1) presents the F-ratios and significance associated with the differences between the variables that were compared. The results on the social scale of the Child Test form, indicate that general self-esteem scores were significantly higher for the gifted students than for the control group. ($F = 6.368$, $p < .0126^*$). The results of the Adult test form indicated a significant difference in the level of self-esteem between males and females ($F = 4.42$, $p < .037^*$), with the males showing a significantly higher level of self-esteem. Upon further analysis, data indicated a significant interaction between sex and race ($F = 4.043$, $p < .046^*$). (As indicated in Figure 1). The minority females exhibited significantly lower levels of self-esteem, while the levels of self-esteem in the non-minority males and females, and the minority males were all comparable.

Figure 1



The results indicated no significant differences in self esteem based on the students race and level of intelligence, on either the Adult or Child form of the test ($F = .754$, $p < .3866$).

A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted on the self-esteem scores of seven students who completed the academic enrichment program. No significant differences were found as a result of program participation ($F = .144$, $p < .9898$).

Discussion

Consistent with past studies (e.g., Tidwell, 1979), the level of self-esteem was found to be higher for the intellectually gifted students than for the control group. This higher level of self-esteem may be attributed to the fact that gifted students receive positive reinforcement from their environment more often than the average students. This consistent positive reinforcement fosters the development of self-confidence and allows the gifted students to see themselves as being successful, facilitating a better self concept.

There are many possible social/cultural reasons for the lower level of self-esteem found among minority females. Because minority females belong to two distinct minorities, Black (race) and Female (sex), minority women may have fewer opportunities open to them. Feeling that they are at a disadvantage, may lead them to set low goals for themselves, which is reinforcing to their negative self-perceptions.

The study of self esteem also holds important educational implications. Chance (1982) writes that in two children with the same

amount of intelligence, the child with high self esteem may make better use of his abilities. O'Malley and Bachman (1979) studied the relationship between low self esteem and poor achievement. A correlation was found to exist between the children with low self esteem and low grades. Purkey (1970) suggests that this may be due to the low goals that such children may set for themselves implying that minority students may be underrepresented in programs for the gifted because of the low goals set for themselves based on their self esteem. It is important for educational systems to be aware of this relationship in order to foster strong positive self concepts not only in the minority students, but in all students.

The finding of no significant difference in self-esteem as a result of participating in an enrichment program should be interpreted with caution due to the limited subject pool (N=7). Additional research in this area is warranted to further explore possible explanations that may be useful in strengthening intervention programs for academically at-risk students.

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